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REV. MR. KIRK'S

DEDICATION SERMON.

THE UNRIVALLED GLORY OF THE CROSS. 2

A

SERMON, 1844 3

DELIVERED AT THE

DEDICATION OF THE CHURCH

BELONGING TO THE

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MOUNT VERNON CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY.

BY

EDWARD N. KIRK. 1

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SERMON.

GAL. VI. 14.

GOD FORBID THAT I SHOULD GLORY, SAVE IN THE CROSS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

AT an earlier period of his life, Saul of Tarsus would not have uttered this sentiment. He was accustomed to glory in himself, and in those attainments and accomplishments which secure the esteem of mankind. He had especially gloried in himself before the Jews; among whom he had more than ordinary reason to "have confidence in the flesh;" being "circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law a Pharisee; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." Thus he had once gloried in circumcision like those whom he now so sharply reproves. But what a change! Circumcision, Judaism, talents, learning, have all lost their lustre in his view. "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." He had formerly despised the cross as much as its sternest enemy. But now it engrosses him, transforms him; now he exchanges all, despises all for it. The pomp, riches, pleasures, and favor of the world

have lost their attractiveness; its contempt and persecution their terrors, for he has seen the glory of that which the world despises, and the vanity of that in which it glories.

And his indignation is aroused at seeing the Galatians so soon drawn away from this very foundation of their hopes; and that, by false and flattering teachers, who avail themselves of the offensive features of the cross to bring the Christian church to a modified and more popular form of Judaism. Knowing that the cross is resisted by the pride, vanity, and superstition of man's depraved heart, they accommodate their religious inventions to these cherished tendencies. They reject the doctrine of the cross, because it denies the existence of any moral good in man by nature, before God, man, or conscience; asserts his total dependence for deliverance, on another—his immense guilt, as a transgressor of God's law—his deep indebtedness to the Redeemer—his obligation to sympathize with Christ in all his humiliation, and in that of his cause—and faith to be the only condition of salvation. And in the place of all this, they substitute a connection with a venerated and ancient church, and dependence on a form or rite of religion, in which they may both retain a full estimate of their own excellence, and avoid the reproach of the world.

A young religious society, by the services of this night, is taking its position more prominently among the public institutions of our community. And the occasion calls upon us to unfurl our banner, and

declare to the world our distinctive sentiments, and to show where our dependence lies, what are our resources, our aims, and our hopes; in a word, the type of our Christianity. Inspiration has furnished us a motto, to utter and to unfold which be my delightful task now, and to the end of life. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is expressed in the first person and in the singular number; but it is the voice of the whole church of Christ, and in other language means—

THE CHRISTIAN CAN GLORY IN NOTHING BUT THE CROSS OF CHRIST.

Glorying in any object is used in the Scriptures to express the confidence in that object as fitted to make us acceptable to God, and exalt us above our fellow men who do not possess it. Glorying in the cross alone, is renouncing every other ground of self-complacency, and of human or divine approbation. But what is the cross? The word in its primitive use is applied to the punishment of slaves for the worst crimes. It held among the Romans precisely the position which the gallows does with us, as we may see in Cicero's indignant appeal to Verres, who had crucified Gavius, a Roman citizen, after having beaten him with rods.* And it is of the more consequence to notice this fact, because, since the days of Constantine, the most important feature of its meaning has been lost. As soon as the Christian

* Oration against Verres, vi. § 63.

religion came under royal patronage, the cross lost its offensiveness, not by a renovation of the human heart, not by the change of any vital doctrine, but by the subtlest of all devices, that of using this distinctive badge of Christianity to symbolize and glorify the very spirit of anti-christian paganism.

I intend then to show:

I. *That the cross in which the Christian glories, is the person of Christ in his humiliated state, and the redemption of Christ in its humiliating influence on man.*

None can deny that Paul was here glorying in Christianity; nor that he was uttering a paradox before men; singularly uniting shame and glory. But the question is, whether it was in those features of Christianity which please the world now, or in those which displease it.

We have here a specimen of the fearful deception practised on mankind by the great foe of the cross. He had employed that instrument for the overthrow of the Son of God and his kingdom. But soon discovering the error and shortsightedness of his policy, and seeing that this very cross was to be the destruction of his empire; that it was going, with all its aspect of shame, and its terms of self-denial, to seize upon the hearts of men, he determined to set up a kingdom under the very name of Christ, to avail himself of the growing splendor of his cross, and thus to fight the head of the church with his own weapons. And to the present hour, he is still working out this scheme. That which was originally a badge of shame before the world, a sign

of weakness, a signal of persecution, "now hangs as an ornament from the neck of beauty, blazes on the flags of navies, and the standards of armies; and before it millions bow in adoration." But in all this we must observe that there has come to be not only a difference, but a full opposition between the cross and the crucified one. His own distinctive banner is now unfurled by his most determined enemies, to deceive his friends and the world. From these circumstances we are liable to misunderstand the meaning of our text and kindred passages. The word *cross* has come so extensively to represent a beautiful appendage to splendid buildings, an emblem of a religion patronized by the great, a part of a religious system full of superstition and self-righteousness; on the other side, a term for a theology in which man's degeneracy, guilt, and ruin, and Christ's atoning sacrifice for sin, are denied; that it is difficult for many to understand Paul as he meant.

We must then remember that the form of the cross belonged to pagan Rome. It was used by the Cæsars as a sign of victory, previously to the Christian era. And the modern Cæsars, retaining the pagan love of empire under the garb of a world-renouncing Christianity, found it convenient to re-adopt it and revive its ancient glory, that thus they might retain alike the Christian who loved it as a symbol of his faith, and the pagan who gloried in the ancient dominion of Rome. And if the page of history can be trusted, there has been more of the pagan than of the Christian association with

the cross for fifteen hundred years. Surely this is not an unfounded nor unjust reproach; but the fact should be fully understood, that the cross is most extensively, rather the sign of a worldly than of a Christ-like spirit. Taste has been lavished upon it; and beauty, full of self-complacency, has employed it only to ornament the person. It has become associated in many minds with the popularity rather than the contemptibleness of Christianity. It reminds them of the by-gone days when mighty armies went to war with this peaceful badge upon their banners; when it waved in proud defiance over the battlements of baronial castles; when it graced the beauties of the court, and sat upon the diadem of princes. All this aspect charms them. Others again remember it with delight as the badge of an ecclesiastical nobility. This is its principal charm to them. While with millions it is as completely an instrument of superstition, as was the circumcision to which Paul here opposes it; while others again who have taken from Christianity those features of offensiveness which were the very elements of its power, are now willing to designate their popular form of Christianity by the once offensive name of the cross. Let us then go back to the meaning of the phrase as Paul employed it, that we may understand the nature and spirit of the gospel here expressed by him. The cross, in that day, meant literally, an ignominious instrument of punishment. And our text in modern phraseology would be—"I glory in the gallows or gibbet of Christ." Figuratively it designated the person of the Son of God

abased to the condition of a despised impostor in the estimation of men; his sufferings in the stead of sinful man; his cause, which none could espouse until he had abandoned self-complacency, pride, superstition, and self-righteousness. And because the humiliation of Christ and his atoning sacrifice, as the sole ground of human hope, opposes the sinful heart of man more than any other feature of the gospel, he selects this title for the whole system.

We affirm, then, that the way of salvation by Christ has always had, and now has, an aspect of shame to the unbelieving world.

1. *It was so to the greater part of the Jewish church and nation.* The Messiah fell utterly below all their expectations. His birth, sentiments, life, and death, baffled their hopes. The leaders, as described in prophecy, who were appointed of God to be the builders of the church, examined this stone and pronounced it unfit to be the head of the corner. Their hatred became so intense, that they pursued him to death, and excommunicated his followers. He came to his own, but they received him not. He was despised and rejected of men.

2. *Thus the pagan world regarded him.* From the calm philosopher to the enterprising craftsman, every rank in society found the doctrine of the cross opposing some favorite theory, feeling, or interest. And while many in every part of the world gave a favorable reception to the preaching of the cross, yet it entered no place without arousing the contempt and hatred of men in high and low stations.

3. *Thus the human heart regards it now.* We

have said that men are naturally proud, vain, and superstitious. And the doctrines and requirements of the gospel make it unpalatable to men, so far as they are under the influence of these propensities; and of course it must be unpopular to maintain those doctrines and urge those requirements where pride, self-righteousness and vain superstition have the ascendancy. We are not here using and repeating epithets in an indiscriminate nor professional manner, nor because their sound amuses us. They express to us precisely the antagonism of the human heart to the cross. By pride we mean the self-satisfaction that is felt when one contemplates any thing in or pertaining to him, in such a light as to make him form a higher estimate of himself than God expresses of human nature, in his word. By vanity, we mean the exaggerated desire to have others esteem us more than they could if they knew us, and had a right standard of character. By self-righteousness and superstition, we mean whatever makes sinful man think that he or his doings, secular or religious, are acceptable to God without respect to the atonement and mediation of Christ. The cross admits of no rival, no matter how innocent and lovely, or even religious in itself. It counts all for paganism which rivals it, whether it be native excellence, or ecclesiastical relations, or religious ceremonies. And when men see how they are to be abased by the cross, as he was who hung upon it; when they see it staining all human glory, levelling human distinctions in the matter of acceptance with God, they cannot tolerate it; and they

despise the cross, while they cling to their supposed merit, or depend upon their superstitious rites.

But did not Paul know all this? He knew it. He knew as his Lord had known, that sin had blinded men, and that real glory was, in their eye, shame. Was it eccentricity in him? No; there never was a man who acted more fully on the principles of a sound common sense than he. Was it from a supercilious contempt of other men's good will, or of their opinions? No; never man studied more than he, the things that were lovely, honest, and of good report; none more careful to avoid any uncalled for attack on prejudice. Was it from mental imbecility? Let one who thinks so, measure weapons with him. Was it from the want of learning? No; he was Gamaliel's pupil in the learning of revelation and sacred tradition. The Greek philosophy and literature were not strange to him. Why then did Paul glory in that which so many of his own day despised, and so many now despise?

We proceed to show:

II. *Why we should glory in the cross, and only in the cross.*

1. *On account of its intrinsic glory.* Men have their reasons for despising it. Some imagine themselves wise in rejecting the scriptural statements of the incarnation and vicarious atonement; others think they have made great advances in attaching vast importance to one form or one rite of Christianity beyond another. But after all, the true glory of Christianity itself is in the cross; in the dignity

and grace of the sufferer, and in the effects of his crucifixion. Deny the essential deity of Christ; consider him only as the son of Mary; turn away your eye from all that is said of his existing "before Abraham" and "in the beginning;" of his creating and sustaining and controlling all things; remove the evidence that he was the Jehovah of the Old Testament, who so often assumed a human form to manifest himself to his people; silence the testimony of Isaiah when he says—"Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Father of Eternity, the Prince of Peace;" strike out all this, and then let that good man Jesus, go up like so many other good men before and after him, to the altar of martyrdom; but you may well be ashamed that any one should ask you to glory in his cross, as the foundation of your hope, any more than in Socrates' cup of poison. Silence the harp of prophecy, when it sings even of the parting of one of his garments and the casting lots for the other, of the gall and the vinegar, of piercing him and of mocking him. Tear out the logic and the teaching of the New Testament; arrest the tide of grateful, rapturous song from angels and the redeemed in heaven, and then say that there is no special glory in the cross; then say that it was just as absurd in Paul to call the system of New Testament theology by the name of the cross, as it would be to call the Socratic philosophy the cup of Socrates, or by any other absurdity you please. But

when you have learned from God's own testimony, that he whom angels worship, who counts it not robbery to be equal with God, comes to our earth to put on our nature and bear our sins and take away the curse and bring in an everlasting redemption and lay the foundation of the most glorious empire in the universe, then you may learn to glory in the cross. It is impossible for all the learning of the age, and all the power of human reasoning, ever to reduce that cross to the level of a common martyrdom. That a book so unrivalled as the Bible should have been written with so commanding a reference to it; that so strange a people as the Jews should have been raised up to give birth to him; that their whole ceremonial system should have had such supreme reference to his sacrifice for sin; that their typical sacrifices should have ceased so soon after his death; that so many peculiar events should have concurred to make him evidently the great theme of prophecy; and that his death should hold so prominent a place in that prophecy; that his forerunner should have so distinctly prophesied of him, revered him before he knew him personally, called him the sacrificial expiating Lamb of God; that Moses and Elijah should have appeared, leaving their glorious habitations to confer only about his decease at Jerusalem; that he himself should have made his death the great end to which he looked forward as the consummation of the peculiar work he came to do; that after his death the proclamation of pardon through his blood should have revolutionized the nations; that the completion of the New

Testament canon should have been left to one man more than to any other, and that man pre-eminent for exalting the cross of Christ above every thing and every being and every event; that the proclamation of this truth should be the only successful instrument to unlock the door of pagan prejudice, the only sword to slay the demon of idolatry—these are facts which should make wise men pause, and believe there may be some things which their philosophy and their theology have not dreamed of. I know you hear little about the cross in the halls of science, in the circles of the learned, in the haunts of business; shall I say in the pulpits of the sanctuary? But it remains true, that a distinguished being, whom angels adore and devils fear, has taken a peculiar interest in the affairs of our world; that he has been among us, the most truthful, gentle, pure, elevated, wise, powerful, and benevolent, the race has ever known. The fact of his previous existence you cannot deny. His incarnation then you must admit; mysterious it may be, but real it is. Well, that is wonderful, and not despicable, surely in the eyes of those with whom he came to make common cause. He spake about his death in a very remarkable manner; he was going to give his flesh for meat, and his blood for drink, and this for the life of the world; he said he was to be raised up on a tree to save the dying, just like the brazen serpent in the camp of Israel. I repeat it, there is something about all this, inexplicable on the ordinary principles of human reasoning; something which never has been solved by the principles

of any philosophy; but which stands forth in scriptural theology, clear, glorious and blessed to our guilty race.

But why should any tarry out in the cold regions of speculation and conjecture, when a divine guide beckons to the interior of this glorious temple, illumined by the Shecinah of God's instruction!

I have said there is true glory in the cross, and was led to contemplate the lustre shed on that hideous instrument of shame and death by the character of its victim. But our argument turns mainly on two other points—the manifestation of the perfections of God, and the effects of the cross on man.

It discovers more fully than any object, the glory of God. It is not the greatest glory of the sun that he shines so brightly and steadily, diffusing light and heat over so many planets, binding their "sweet influences" together in one system, by his exceeding power. No; the eye of science, the ear of poetry, the heart of piety, find nothing in him so glorious as that God made him; he is a ray of the Creator's benignity, an outspoken voice of his parental goodness, a sign of his power, a proof of his wisdom. This is true of every thing beautiful, useful, or wonderful. But nothing has so much of this glory as the cross. The difference is in the degree of clearness, fulness, and harmony in their respective revelations. These are the questions we want to ask of creation's oracles,—Is God good, how good; is he just, how just; how then can justice and mercy meet in the forgiveness and salvation of a sinner?

Is God good? We find good and evil so balanced in nature, that we cannot decide. No end seems to be clearly pointed out; gloomy, too, is the cloud on creation's brow to man, when conscious of his sins. The clearest light of creation has been dubious to the wisest men, in determining the benevolence of God. Now ask the cross. "God so *loved* the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life," is its reply. The end of the arrangement is God's glory in man's forgiveness. The curse is removed, "for he was made a curse for us." Will he pardon? "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Here is the unfolding of a purpose of mercy; of a way of pardon. Here is love, infinite pity looking down from that cross on poor, sinful man.

Is he just? There is much in nature to contradict it. Good and bad men have complained of this uncertainty, and conjectured a future state to clear it up. But the cross is clear and full. It is to God's perfections a moral prism. He is light, clear, perfect, unquenchable light, whose brightness no created eye, much less a sinner's eye, could gaze upon. But the cross has refracted and analyzed it, and spread its component parts like a rainbow around his throne forever.

How good is he? Men find not a God in creation to love, and trust. Providence is carrying on a severe discipline; but to what end, it says not. And what, if it makes us good, is to be done with the sins of the past? Your philosophy or your de-

sires may push them into a corner, but conscience still says—No; they must be otherwise disposed of. But here is complete reconciliation made manifest through the cross; "that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." The high priest has entered the holy of holies *for us*, "through the veil of his flesh."

How just is he? Creation here answers confusedly. But how terrible the answer from the cross! Behold that sufferer! Is he innocent? Pilate says he is; Herod confirms it; Judas declares it; friends proclaim it; enemies dare not deny it. God says he was "without sin." You say so; but add, that you are horror-struck at the thought of the innocent dying to save the guilty. This, you exclaim, is utter injustice. But what then say you to his dying for nothing? God put him to death. It was his purpose "from the foundation of the world," to slay this Lamb; for he is called the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." We say he was put to death by justice, to accomplish an end proposed by mercy. Judge you which is the most scriptural, and which the most consistent view. But how fearful is this display of justice in the agonies of the vicarious sufferer!

How can he be just and good in the same case? Creation is still dumb. Every heathen oracle is dumb. So are the schools of the sages. Even angels are mute. They in holy patience await the solution through revolving ages, and then they turn and stoop to the cross, to see and hear it. God is righteous in pardoning sin; and the law and the

sinner glory together in the cross. There is more of justice manifested there, than in hell, more of mercy than in heaven! Such is a sketch of its intrinsic glory.

Its effects on man illustrate its glory. History has recorded some of them—the modern civilization, the modern civil and religious freedom, can be traced directly to the minds and the hearts that the cross had taught and inspired. But these were only the temporary and incidental results. Its mighty power is in the transformation of the heart, which Paul here calls, being "crucified to the world." Place, if you please, at the head of the list the fierce, malignant, bigoted persecutor, Saul of Tarsus. Then count backward to believing Abel, for the efficacy of the cross covers the field of time, nay stretches back to the councils of eternity, and onward to its destinies; come down through patriarchs and Jews, through the ancient church; follow the swelling stream, now taking on its bosom the blood-stained murderers of God's beloved; trace through the centuries past and the centuries to come; observe the transformation of character, the awakening as from the dead, the dawning of immortal hopes, the mighty and successful struggles against sin, the overthrow of principalities and powers, the final destruction of the kingdom of darkness; count the joys that have flowed into human hearts by the cross, the tears it has dried, the death-beds it has encircled with glory, the houses and hearts of mourning it has cheered; then enter the portals of heaven, and when your weary eyes can gaze and

count no longer, come back to the cross, the shameful, cruel, bloody cross; for there is the well-spring of all this ocean of holiness and blessedness. Shall I follow the sublime hint of revelation and say; ask that bright seraph who stands yonder at the very footstool of the King, what secures his standing there; he will point you to the cross. Oh blind, conceited sinner, you may despise the cross; but let me, a sinner like you, stand with Paul, and gaze and adore and trust. And while I look upward and catch the adoring gaze of that innumerable company, I can regard your contempt with pity, whether that contempt arise from your glorying in the native or acquired excellence of your character, or in the superiority of your ecclesiastical connexions, rites and ceremonies. If the idea of glorying in shame is not yet made clear, let us refer back to the primitive Christianity. The disciples knew that the world despised, and the church rejected their Master; but they knew too that he was "smitten for *our* transgressions, and bruised for *our* iniquities." They saw the moral greatness of that suffering, the unrivalled dignity of the divine and perfect human nature met in that mysterious being, the immeasurable love expressed in that sacrifice. They saw that the self-righteousness and pride which rejected his vicarious atonement were only a part of the depravity of human nature. He who suffered there was their God and Savior, their Friend and Teacher. The blood and groans and agony and ignominy and death were in themselves, no more agreeable to them than to other men. But they had associations with

these disagreeable objects, so elevated, so tender, so full of gratitude and hope and joy, that they came absolutely to glory in them. And when they found the doctrines of Christ's essential divinity, his incarnation, his vicarious sufferings to remove the curse of eternal death from men as odious as the cross itself, they gloried equally in them. And not a line has one of them left, that expresses glorying in human merit, in native excellence, in moral worth of native growth, in the venerableness of their church or the excellence of its rites. Their constant feeling is—God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We may then pass to consider the cross in contrast with all else in which man glories; and say,

2. *The cross is to man, the only ground of glorying.* For, he surely has nothing apart from his moral nature and its relations, in which to glory. Nothing else has sufficient grandeur, purity and endurance. Birth is one of the things in which man glories. His father or ancestor was better or greater than some other man's father. Birth does indeed confer privileges and responsibilities. But it gives nothing intrinsic, nothing that God values, nothing that will be valued in heaven. Human approbation is gloried in. But it is not discriminating; is generally partial, and opposite to God's approbation; Christ rejected it; he told his disciples to count it joy to be reproached by a sinful world. Always let it be remembered, too, that human judgment pronounced the Son of God unfit to live. Riches, and the ease and the luxury they procure, make men self-confident

and self-contented; but these are not real excellence. Nor is there any ground of glorying to man, in any thing intrinsic in his moral nature. It is a free gift of God's goodness, designed to inspire gratitude and an humble sense of dependence; "all have come short of the glory of God;" that is, all have perverted every gift of God, and so failed both of attaining to true glory in his sight, and of accomplishing the glorious end he has proposed to us. No man therefore should be proud of his native qualities or his attainments. This point is vital in Christianity; that no man can glory in himself. "No man is *justified* by deeds of law." None stands accepted in his own person and right. Nor is human wisdom a ground of boasting. Hear the divine injunction, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, nor the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment and righteousness." That is the Old Testament way of expressing an exclusive glorying in that cross, where God displays his loving-kindness, judgment and righteousness. The new birth is no natural relation, no gift of man, no result of our wisdom or excellence, no purchase, no reward; but a free gift, the product of supernatural agency, as we are taught in the Scriptures; to "them" (who received Christ) "gave he power to become the sons of God; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Nor can we find any ground of con-

fidence toward God in any other external object, even though it be in itself, an institution of divine origin. Circumcision, sacrifices, baptism and prayer are all of divine origin; but none of them in itself ever gave a man merit before God. They were all in their place indispensable; some of them are so still. But they were not what the cross is, in the matter of salvation. To glory in them, is most sinful; while, to glory in the cross and in the cross alone, is the highest attainment of piety. What then shall we say of glorying in the merely human parts of religion? I mean those which men have invented. Those of one sect may be more expedient, more refined, better adapted to one country, or state of society, than those of another. But this can never justify the arrogance and self-confidence with which Christian sects are wont to contemplate their peculiarities of government, creed, or ceremony.

Why then should we glory only in the cross? Because it places us before God on a footing of reconciliation; because it is the fountain of all excellence in us, meets all the wants of our fallen nature, secures in us a fitness for heaven, and gives us our only title to a dwelling there.

But if this be so, it may be asked—

Why does not the human mind instinctively anticipate this great and indispensable provision? Because men entertain very imperfect and unscriptural notions of justice as an element in the character and government of God. The cross is a provision of mercy to satisfy justice; not of the Son to

satisfy the Father; but of a God of mercy and justice to satisfy himself in pardoning the transgressors of law; or in the language of the Scriptures, "that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth." Men have exalted mercy into a supreme attribute of God. But the Scriptures inform us, as fully and variously and completely, that God is just, as that he is good. And they confirm our interpretation of justice, as—God's approbation of a righteous moral government, and of law as the medium of its administration; an inflexible, unalterable purpose in God, to exhibit his disapprobation of sin, and his approbation of the law which it has violated. So long then as men have such imperfect and incorrect conceptions of God's feelings and purposes, so low an estimate of his holiness and their guilt before him, they must either count the cross a stumbling-block, with the Jew; or esteem it foolishness, with the Greek. And besides, if men had naturally such conceptions of the divine justice as the Scriptures furnish, they could not anticipate how love would meet the claims of justice. This mystery is one of the highest displays of divine wisdom; and if man could not anticipate the principles of the solar system, or the vegetable kingdom, much less could he anticipate those of redemption.

Why do men reject it when it is revealed? Because it requires man to renounce all intrinsic grounds of confidence, and embrace one entirely out of himself. Thus it combats self-esteem, the love of esteem, and emulation. It puts all men on a

level in the matter of salvation. It counts as nothing the virtues so prized by mankind, until they spring up at the foot of the cross. It involves a life of dependence and submission. It makes faith and prayer to be the medium of spiritual life, and the most entire self-diffidence to be our security; while it lays us under the strongest obligations to abandon our own will, and in all things strive to please and glorify our ascended Lord. It proclaims the exceeding guilt of every man for whom Christ died; as that whole price was paid for each of us.

Why do men substitute for the cross, other provisions of grace, or even their own inventions? That this question may be understood, we state that such substitution is effected by making unscriptural terms of salvation. Baptismal regeneration is one of those inventions, by which fanatical zeal seeks to bind men to a particular sect. The indispensableness of ascertaining the ecclesiastical genealogy of him who administers the ordinances to us, is another. So is every attempt to place the cross below in point of attention, and subsequent in point of time, to other, through scriptural requirements. When the inquirer after the path of life is directed first to questions of "endless genealogy," and "old wives' fables," and points of ecclesiastical policy, and modes of baptism, and sectarian peculiarities, rather than the cross of Christ, then men have displaced that cross. It is done, too, by giving one church something else than the cross in which to glory over another, among themselves and before the world. A church that founds its hope upon the in-

carnation and vicarious sufferings of Christ, has a right to reject the pretensions of a church which founds its hope upon man's intrinsic goodness, and makes the death of Christ only a martyrdom. But why do those who alike profess to glory in nothing but the cross, after all, get some party-badge, by which they can look upon their fellow Christians and say,—'You are not the church; you shall not sit at our communion-table; you shall not preach in our pulpits'? And how shall we account for this tendency in good men? We suggest as its causes—

Party-spirit, or the perversion of the social principle. The selfishness of man makes him exclusive, aristocratic, clanish. And so long as good men are imperfectly sanctified, this poor, weak propensity of their hearts will build up sectarian walls, to secure a perfect uniformity of views and practice, even at the sacrifice of a vital union of affection. Charity is not with them as perfect a bond as something else. Now abide with them many things; but the greatest is not charity.

Ambition and pride, have their share of influence. It is not glory enough for some men to be Christians; they must be Christians of a peculiar brilliancy. And if this ambition would take the direction of seeking to be more like Christ than any one else, to glory more exclusively in the cross than all others; in a word, if the struggle were, to have greater real personal excellence than others, it would bless the church. But this is not the case generally. The effort seems to be to find something

which, instead of mortifying pride and arrogance, shall increase and nourish them. Such, to my view, are the vauntings of all our sects. And they are all alike unchristian.

Superstition, or the tendency to attach properties and powers to forms, which pertain only to substance, is as much a native of the human heart in America as in India. One form may indeed be better adapted than another, to aid the heart in its religious exercises. But man is by nature averse to spiritual exercises; and he readily seeks for satisfaction to his conscience by the performance of some outward rite; and when he obtains such a rite as affects him agreeably by its influence on the imagination, or the nervous sensibility, or any other natural susceptibility, he readily mistakes that for piety. Hence he often attaches great consequence to the fine arts as instruments of piety. And then he becomes a stern defender of the rite, or the form, or the dogma, or the church which so fosters his superstition. To glory in a ceremony, or a doctrine, requires little effort, little spirituality, and little humility. But to glory in the cross, is to live near heaven, is to overcome self and the world. Few attain to it; and so, many are superstitious. But still it remains true, that the Christian, as such, can glory in nothing but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Suffer me then, in conclusion, to observe, in behalf of this church;

1. *That it glories only in the cross of Christ.*

This house it has erected, to draw the attention of men to the crucified and glorified Redeemer, and to spread his glories through the world. It avows its full belief in the moral degeneracy of the human race, in the guilt of every human being capable of moral action, in the justice of the condemnation of the sinner. It places all its own hope for forgiveness, in the atonement of the Son of God. It has no other hope for other men; it points to no other remedy. It renounces the wisdom of the schools, and counts the cross the wisdom of God. It depends on no power for success, but the power of the cross. All other systems of morality fail to reach the root of moral evil in the heart. All other systems of religion fail to recommend us to God. To him that died to redeem us, we owe every blessing and every hope. To him, then, let our praises continually ascend, and mingle with the anthems of those that have gone before us. Here let the name of Jesus be as perfume poured forth. Here may the cross be so held up, that the perishing can see it, and live; here may the atoning efficacy of his blood embolden the timid to draw nigh and offer the fervent, effectual, and prevailing prayer of faith. We hope to celebrate that death often here, in the ordinance of his appointment. We avow to the friendly and indifferent, that we understand the Lord's Supper, the celebration of the death of Christ, to be unlike all other festivals. They

are usually joyful commemorations of the birth or victory or brilliant actions of a benefactor. But by his appointment, we select the darkest hour of his history to celebrate. We tread no path so often as that across Kedron to the garden. That love is to us no common love, that death no common, nor even an extraordinary martyrdom. It is more than this, more than all other events. The Lord's Supper is to us the most significant of ordinances; not that we eat more than bread in it; but we study there, to the greatest advantage, God and the way of access to him. We there get the strongest encouragement in our toils and trials, and the strongest motives to the performance of our duty.

All the teachings from this sacred place are to emanate from the cross, exhibit the cross, and exalt the cross. We are to do our part in holding up to this community the personal divinity of the Son of God, the mystery of his incarnation, the necessity of his atonement, and its efficacy. The people of this city should see it spiritually, as Constantine feigns to have done corporeally; glorious in the mid-air, with the motto—"by this I conquer."

Our hope for the renovation of man is in the Spirit of God. And we have full confidence in supplications for the Spirit to make efficacious the preaching of the cross.

2. *That this Church extends its Christian fellowship to all who glory in nothing but the cross.*

If others have any thing that they place before it, or substitute for it as a term of fellowship, they separate from us, not we from them.

If man can be saved on the ground of his own merit, then we are wrong, for we deny it utterly.

If he deserves not the eternal wrath of God, then we are in error, for we assert it strongly.

If Christ is only man, or only angel, or only a created superior angel, we are in fatal error, for we believe most fully in his being true and very God manifest in the flesh.

If the blood of Christ is not a substitute in the place of our punishment, we are in fatal error, for our hope of forgiveness stands exclusively on that foundation.

If any thing is necessary to be a Christian, but to have a genuine and transforming faith in Christ's atonement; and if glorying in the cross does not constitute the essential bond of union between all Christians, then we are away from the truth. But our position is taken, and we thus avow it, and offer to all who have no personal merit before God to glory in, no native excellence in his sight, no privilege of birth or fortune, no talent nor attainment, no church connexion, no rite nor ceremony in which to glory; who have nothing more to glory in than the poor dying thief, and who boast only and ever of the cross; to such we extend the right hand of fellowship, for with them we shall be forever one in that world where all bow down and give glory only to the Lamb that was slain.

3. *That this Church entertains the hope*—

—for itself. That God would take from it a disposition to glory in any thing personal, human, peculiar in their sect, their house or their services;

that they may exalt Christ, and Christ alone; that their preacher may glory in the cross; that the cross may give the kindling fervor to his preaching; that under it, from Sabbath to Sabbath, the glories of the world may vanish away, the pride of man may be abased, while the uplifted cross opens the door of heaven to their view, and by it they become crucified to the world and the world to them.

— for sister churches; that they with us may renounce all limited, party grounds of confidence and glorying, and come to this broad common ground, where we shall rejoice together throughout eternity; that they may not be seduced by the spirit of sectarian pride and superstition now coming in upon us.

— for the world; that the cross may be preached to every member of the human family. How glorious the effect! The destruction of selfishness (which is individuality too strongly developed, or absorption in personal interests) will be effected by giving a ground of self-complacency out of self. This will destroy pride in all its offensive forms, by giving a common ground of boasting. Thus the scriptural idea will be realized, of a body in perfect harmony, receiving all from its head. There will then be no more room for envying talents, station, or riches; it will reconcile men to their lot and their sufferings; it will destroy formal religion; best of all, it will lead men to God, and prepare them for heaven.

BRIEF HISTORY

OF THE

MOUNT VERNON CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH.

During the years 1840 and 1841, several brethren of the Orthodox Congregational Churches in Boston, were impressed with the importance of forming a new church in the city, with a view of obtaining the services of the Rev. Edward N. Kirk as its Pastor. These impressions having been strengthened in the latter part of the year 1841, during a season of special religious interest in the churches, a meeting of Pastors and lay brethren was called to consider the subject, Dec. 16, 1841.

The following is a transcript of the official record of that meeting.

"A meeting of the Pastors and several lay brethren from the Orthodox Congregational churches in this city, was held at the house of Dea. Daniel Safford, on Thursday, December 16th, 1841, at 3 o'clock, P. M.

The meeting was called to consider the expediency of forming a new Orthodox Congregational church in this city, and inviting the Rev. Edward N. Kirk to become its Pastor.

There were present, of the Pastors, the Rev. Messrs. Aiken, Adams, Winslow, Rogers, Blagden, and Towne, and the Rev. Seth Bliss, Secretary of the American Tract Society; of the lay brethren, Deacons Samuel T. Armstrong, Pliny Cutler, Daniel Safford, Lewis T. Stoddard, Eliphalet Kimball, Lemuel P. Grosvenor, N. P. Rogers, Charles Scudder, Daniel Noyes, James Tufts, and Charles Stoddard, Messrs. Moses L. Hale, George W. Crockett, Samuel Hubbard, Thomas A. Davis, Charles W. Homer, and William W. Stone.

Samuel T. Armstrong was called to preside and William W. Stone to act as Secretary.

The Rev. N. Adams led in prayer. The Rev. Mr. Aiken stated the object for which the meeting was called, and each individual present was requested to express his views of the proposal. The Rev. Messrs. Rogers, Aiken, Winslow, Adams, Blagden, Towne, and Bliss, were unanimously of opinion that a new Orthodox Congregational church in this city should be formed without delay, and that the Rev. Edward N. Kirk should be obtained, if possible, for its Pastor, and expressed their readiness to render any aid in their power towards accomplishing the object.

The lay brethren present unanimously coincided in these views, provided satisfactory assurances could be given that sufficient funds could be obtained to erect a house of worship.

On motion of the Rev. Mr. Bliss, a Committee of nine was appointed to take the subject into consideration, and to take such measures for the accomplishment of the object, as they should deem expedient, with power to fill vacancies in the Committee.

The following brethren were appointed on this Committee :— Rev. Seth Bliss, Deacons P. Cutler, Charles Scudder, Charles Stoddard, Julius A. Palmer, Daniel Safford, Messrs. George W. Crockett, Moses L. Hale, and William W. Stone.

After the reading of the above records by the Secretary, and their adoption as the doings of the meeting, Rev. Mr. Aiken led in prayer, and the meeting was dissolved.

Samuel T. Armstrong, *Chairman.*
William W. Stone, *Secretary.*"

The Committee thus appointed, after several meetings for consultation and prayer, obtained the names of twenty-five brethren and twenty-two sisters, who consented to be united into a new church, on condition that the Rev. Mr. Kirk should become its Pastor. This proposal having been assented to on the part of the Rev. Mr. Kirk, an Ecclesiastical Council was convened in the Vestry of Park Street Meeting-house, June 1, 1842, when the Church was regularly organized, and the Pastor elect installed.

The Churches represented in this Council were all the Orthodox Congregational Churches in the County of Suffolk ; Second Church in Dorchester; Mercer Street Church in New York city; First Church in Malden; Evangelical Congregational Church in Cambridgeport; Eliot Church in Roxbury; First

Congregational Church in Charlestown; Winthrop Church in Charlestown; First Church in Cambridge.

The Church held its first public religious exercise in the Old South Chapel, which was generously tendered for their use by the Old South Society, upon Sabbath, June 5th, when the Lord's Supper was administered, and several infant children received the ordinance of baptism.

On the 19th day of June, 1842, public worship was commenced in the Lecture Room of the Masonic Temple, and continued there till the 31st of December, 1843.

The first meeting with reference to the erection of a House of Worship, was convened Jan. 3d, 1843, by a public notice from the pulpit, on the preceding Sabbath. At this meeting it was determined, after deliberation and prayer, that the time had arrived, when we were called, in the providence of God, to go forward and erect another sanctuary for his worship. A subscription was accordingly commenced for the purpose, and subsequently the following gentlemen were elected a Building Committee, with full power to select the location and erect the building, to wit:—George W. Crockett, William W. Stone, Daniel Safford, John Slade, Jr., Roland Cutler, Freeman L. Cushman, and George F. Homer.

After many ineffectual attempts to obtain a situation combining the requisite advantages, the Committee in the month of May succeeded in contracting for an estate on the north side of Somerset Court, a site unequalled perhaps by any in the city for the purpose, considering its quiet location, and its advantages for ventilation and light.

On the 23d of June the church voted to assume the name of "Mount Vernon Church," adopting the name by which the western section of the hill has long been known, on which the building is erected.

The corner-stone was laid on the morning of July 4th, 1843, on which occasion an appropriate address was delivered by the Pastor, and the Rev. Lyman Beecher, D. D. led in prayer.

The House having been completed on the 4th of January, 1844, just six months from the day on which the corner-stone was laid, it was solemnly dedicated to the worship of Almighty God. The Pastor was assisted in the services of the occasion

by the Rev. Messrs. Adams, Winslow, Rogers, Aiken, Blagden, and Jenks.

The building is a neat and substantial edifice, finished in plain style, of the Grecian character of architecture, with a granite front. Its dimensions are 75 feet by 97, containing 132 pews on the lower floor, and 50 in the gallery, in which 1,270 persons may be comfortably seated. The organ, manufactured by Thomas Appleton, is of the largest class, containing 1,550 pipes, with three banks of keys, arranged for the choir, swell, and great organ and full pedal base, and is at least in some of its combinations unsurpassed by any instrument of the kind in the city. The basement story of the building is above ground, and contains, besides several committee rooms, a commodious chapel, 68 feet long by 48 feet wide, and 15 feet high, which accommodates 600 persons with seats.

The original number of Church Members was . . .	47	
To which have been added by profession, ...	67	
From churches in various parts of the country, . . .	78	
From churches of our own denomination in the city, .	43	
From churches of other denominations in the city, . .	12	247
From which deduct, Dismissed, ...	4	
Deceased, ...	1	5
Present number, Feb. 1, 1844, ...		242

Of the 200 individuals who have been added to the church, 90, or nearly one half, have come from churches in the country, and churches of other denominations than our own in the city; 67, or a fraction over one third, are from the world; and 43, or a fraction over one fifth, are from sister churches in the city.